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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, March 29, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MYTHS ABOUT YOUR MEALS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A., as reported by the Consumer's Counsel of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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A neighbor of mine told me the other day that he was thinking of giving up eating altogether to prevent a nervous breakdown. Starvation seemed to me an odd remedy for upset nerves and I told him so. Well, he said with all these different notions about food going around, and new ones appearing every day, a fellow just didn't know what to eat nor how to eat anymore. In fact, whenever he sat down to the table he began to wonder if this combination was poisonous or that food worthless until he decided to go without eating and give his nerves and mind a rest.

When I heard that sad account, I was reminded of some helpful remarks made not long ago by Dr. Hazel E. Munsell, who is in charge of the nutrition work at the Bureau of Home Economics. I think you'll be interested if I give you Dr. Munsell's statements on some of the food fads and notions that are abroad today.

She says: "Right now is a good time to start taking many new dietary ideas with a large mixture of common sense. Take the spinach fetish, for example. Never let it be said that I suggested going back on spinach. It's one of our very best sources of iron, and of the vitamins A, B, C, and G, especially when it's cooked a very short time. But the point is that other similar leafy vegetables are good, too. I mean really green greens--kale, and dandelion and turnip tops and beet tops and collards and chard and dock and escarole and lamb's quarters and mustard greens and broccoli. Even though the children in the family may classify all these greens as spinach when they're learning to eat them, still they do appreciate the change in flavor variety gives.

"The same rule applies to the doctrine that carrots made girls beautiful, gave them perfect complexions, bright eyes, and shining hair. Well, that's an old saw that did no harm, because carrots are a good food, and health is certainly conducive to beauty. But the point about that is the same as the point about spinach. Other vegetables with high mineral and vitamin content are good, too. For 'carrots' in that maxim about beauty, just substitute the word 'vegetables.'

"We all know that variety is half the fun of eating. But apart from that, variety is of great value in a diet. Science has not learned all it's going to know about food values. We have gone a long way in the last few years. But we may have a diet with all the food values that we know about now, and have them in exactly the proportions that latest theories dictate,

yet that diet may still lack some very essential element that we haven't discovered—an element that exists without our knowing it in a good mixed diet of natural foods.

"So we all need to be skeptical of ballyhoo that advertises any one food as having all the qualities in it to make the eater young, beautiful, slim, strong, successful and so on. The food that comes nearest to being a perfect food is milk. And milk, even for babies, must be supplemented with the vitamin D of cod liver oil or some other product, and with the vitamin C of orange juice or tomato juice, and with iron.

"And speaking of tomato juice--not so many generations ago tomatoes were 'deadly nightshades' instead of one of our earliest foods. Bananas, too, were considered an indigestible poison, rather than the very easily digested food they are when they're ripe.

"Another belief that most of us have heard and some of us believed is that fish is a 'brain food.' It is, broadly speaking. That is, fish and all other good protein foods like meat and eggs and cheese are good for the whole body, brain included. The brain has a large phosphorous content, but that doesn't entitle it to a prior share of the phosphorus in fish. It has to take its chances with the rest of the organs of the body.

"Of course, sea food has an iodine content which helps to prevent goiter. But all the vegetables and fruits that grow in the seacoast area also have iodine. If you live in the so-called 'goiter belt,' you'll be wise to eat fish often--but that doesn't mean to go in for an iodine fad. The amount of iodine you need is so tiny that it's dangerous to try to supply it by any other method than natural food except on the advice of a good doctor.

"The taboo about eating fish and milk together is another food fallacy. But nobody's afraid of fish chowder or lobster newbergh. The idea that fish and milk are unsafe together probably started with spoiled sea food before the days of good refrigeration. It wasn't the milk but the spoiled sea food that did the trick. People can feel perfectly safe eating good fresh fish cooked in white sauce or baked or scalloped in milk, or drinking a glass of milk with a fish meal.

"Here's a good point to remember. No two foods that are good for you separately will hurt you when you eat them together. That statement quashes not only the indictment against fish and milk but also that taboo against protein and starches at the same meal.

"Another old wives' tale about food is the saying that fruit is 'gold in the morning, silver at noon and lead at night.' Sorry, but that old slogan's got to go the way of the others. The 'apple a day' can just as well be an apple at night.

"The roughage extremists are faddists, too: both the pro-roughage and the anti-roughage groups. It's quite true that many people without technical knowledge have been persuaded to spend precious money they might better have spent on good food for special products they didn't need. And some people are definitely harmed by overdoses of roughage. On the other hand, a certain amount is necessary. You probably don't need any more fibre than you'd get from whole cereal breads and from the fruit and vegetables you'd take in a good, balanced diet.

"Scientific-sounding ballyhoo is one of the greatest hazards for people who are not technically grounded. There is only one safe rule for you and me to follow when we're wondering whether to believe impressive claims for a special product or a special diet or what not. The rule is: First notice whether the one who does the claiming has something to sell. In that case, check his claims with a technical authority in the field who has nothing to sell.

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